



United States Mission to the OSCE

Reply to Ambassador Markus Müller, Head of Center in Bishkek

As delivered by Deputy Representative Douglas Davidson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 27, 2004

I should like to begin this morning by joining others in welcoming warmly to the Permanent Council today Ambassador Müller and also by thanking him for his very thorough report. We were especially impressed by his written contribution, which is focused, complete and very reader-friendly. We believe his priorities are correct and we also believe that he is using the resources provided to his mission by the ACMF and the Permanent Council appropriately.

We very much support the Center's broad range of election-related activities, including work with political parties and the media. With several important elections on the horizon in Kyrgyzstan, we believe that efforts should be aimed at making sure these elections are as free and fair as possible, with good voter participation, a choice of candidates, and media that is free to report on the preparations, conduct and outcome of the voting.

There is a tremendous opportunity now to make great strides in broadening and deepening democratic reforms as part of preparations for the elections. We therefore greatly support the efforts of the Center to continue its cooperation with the Central Election Commission and Parliament in addressing the articles in the new election law that do not yet correspond to international standards and conventions.

We also urge the Kyrgyz authorities to look again at decriminalizing the libel law. Such a step, coupled with ongoing work with journalists to promote professionalism and objective, constructive and critical reporting, would do much to improve the media quality and the media environment in Kyrgyzstan.

Mr. Chairman, we regard very highly the work of the Center in advancing the OSCE Police Assistance Program and, in particular, we encourage its effort to aid the Kyrgyz Government to "humanize" its criminal legislation and to reform the legislation regulating the work of the police.

We also commend the Center's conflict prevention work, especially in the area of border management and cross-border trade, and we call on all parties to cooperate in resolving these issues.

The Center's work in the Economic and Environmental Dimension, namely to combat corruption, to create an environment conducive to business development, and to promote small and medium enterprise development will help address the three biggest problems facing almost all transition economies.

The full benefits of economic integration and globalization will not be realized in countries where corruption is rampant, where there are prohibitive administrative requirements for setting up a business, where laws and practices discourage outside investment, and where small business owners have difficulty starting up or expanding.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I should simply like to thank Ambassador Müller and his entire team in Kyrgyzstan for the fine work they are doing there. It is clear to us that the OSCE Center is in excellent hands.

Thank you very much.